

SPECTRAL TALES



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Number One

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C O N T E N T S

Invocation	2
God's Devil	3
By Dr. John Warwick Montgomery	
An Episode of Prep School History	11
By Peter Cannon	
The Thing from the Sea	17
By Frederick Cowles	
A Tale of a Lonely Island	19
By Jason C. Eckhardt	
Fear	26
By Lin Carter	
M. R. James and the Limitations of the Ghost Story	27
By S. T. Joshi	

INVOCATION

There is an indefinable, or more appropriately, an intangible charm to the seeming paradox of telling a ghost story on Christmas Eve. Ostensibly the goal is to frighten, yet the cozy comfort of the setting belies this. Does the ghost story frighten because it momentarily invades the coziness? Or more likely, does not the spectral visitant rather reinforce the snugness of the reader by the very fact that it is fictitious? "This cannot happen to me, I am safe and secure here." Well, who knows? At any rate, I cannot but think that the carefully constructed mood of the antiquarian ghost story is there more to be enjoyed for its own sake than to "set the reader up" for a good scare by lulling him or her into a false sense of complacency. And perhaps no sub-genre of ghost stories is more enjoyable in this way than the tales of M. R. James and his disciples, E. G. Swain, R. H. Malden, A. N. L. Munby, M. P. Dare, W. C. Dickenson, Christopher Woodforde, and a few others. Spectral Tales is dedicated to the Jamesian ghost story tradition.

This issue features two new antiquarian ghost stories by Peter H. Cannon and Jason C. Eckhardt, and two reprints. First is Lutheran theologian John Warwick Montgomery's "God's Devil," a tale that is sure to be of interest to Jamesians, but which is unlikely to have been seen by many of them. The story appeared as "God's Devil: A Ghost Story with

a Moral" first in Chiaroscuro, 4 (1961), then in Montgomery's collection of essays Principalities and Powers, A New Look at the World of the Occult (1973, 1975) from a fundamentalist publishing house. The other reprint is "The Thing from the Sea" by Frederick Cowles, from his fabulously scarce collection The Horror of Abbott's Grange. Thanks to Richard Dalby and the Cowles estate for permission to publish it here.

This issue of Spectral Tales concludes with a critical article on M. R. James by S. T. Joshi, editor of Lovecraft Studies and Studies in Weird Fiction. Today's foremost scholar on the works of H. P. Lovecraft, Joshi is widely read in the entire field of supernatural fiction. He shares some observations on "M. R. James and the Limitations of the Ghost Story." No one after reading this essay will think to accuse this magazine of purveying uncritical apologetics for MRJ!

Finally, it must be obvious to many readers how great a debt is owed by Spectral Tales to the English magazine Ghosts and Scholars. Imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery, and we rattle no bones about it; in publishing Spectral Tales, we at Cryptic Publications certainly mean to flatter Ghosts and Scholars. To Rosemary Pardoe and her Haunted Library we dedicate our first issue.

Robert M. Price, Editor



GOD'S DEVIL

By John Warwick Montgomery

"So you actually did it. You've become a damned bible-toting clergyman." The smile on Cavender's face was compounded roughly of sixty per cent cynicism and forty per cent genuine interest; knowing from my college days that one could almost never expect a better ratio from him, I realized that no insult was intended. Here, in the hubbub of meaningless small talk which seemed to be moving toward absurdity but never quite reaching it, he wanted a satisfying conversational exchange perhaps as much as I did.

We were standing in front of a large fireplace with the gothic inscription staring out at us as it had so frequently when we were at school together:

AH LIFE! THE MERE LIVING! HOW
FIT TO EMPLOY ALL THE HEART AND
THE SOUL AND THE MIND FOREVER IN
JOY!

"How appropriate," I thought to myself. "Since Cavender and I graduated from old Cornell ten years ago, we have both managed to live out Willard Straight's rather banal aphorism—as long as different definitions of 'joy' are permitted."

"Yes," I said laughing, "I've become a clergyman—and I'll even accept the adjective 'damned,' since a cleric doesn't escape being simul justus et peccator."

"Saint and sinner at the same time," eh? Good God, you're not just a cleric, you're a theologian

to boot." Cavender's face now registered real surprise and a trace of something vaguely approaching admiration. "Notice that your Latin didn't snow me. Old hell-fire Luther, right? Three cheers for my classical education—it finally seems to be paying off in polite conversation as well as in my authority-conscious profession."

"The law, of course," I replied. "You were moving in that direction in your senior year. And"—I eyed my profane friend to see his reaction—"a caustic wit like yours would go to waste outside of dramatic courtroom situations."

"Quite so, quite so," Cavender said, laughing. "And a corporation mouthpiece at that. But why I ended up peeking under Justice's blindfold is the usual drab tale. Whyte's Organization Man, Riesman's Other-directed American, and a wee bit of Oliver Wendell Holmes—put them all together and they don't spell Mother, they spell Ross Cavender. But what I want to know is why you ended up with your intellectual and sartorial collars on backwards. That should be worth hearing. I presume that like George Fox you heard the 'call' and now you spend your spare moments walking barefoot and yelling, 'Woe, woe to the bloody city of Lichfield'—or rather—'New York.' Come on, let's get the hell out of this highball-jiggling mad-house and you can tell me about it."

Without waiting for a reply Cav-

ender started for the door of the Great Hall. His voice trailed off as he elbowed his rather stocky frame through the Amy Vanderbiltish crowd:

"Why in thunder does any sane man come to an alumni reunion? Did all these bastards actually graduate . . ."

I followed as best I could, though not with quite the Cavender aplomb. He headed for the wainscoted browsing-library. Apparently the alumni had not lost the antipathy to scholarly literature which four years of university education manages to create; the library was practically deserted. We sat down in the far corner near the roaring wood fire. Cavender grabbed an ashtray and lit another cigarette from the one he was just finishing. I took out my pipe.

"So," I said, "You want me to tell you how I came to enter the ministry—how I became interested in theology. Actually these are two questions, not one. You remember that in college I was something of a do-gooder—causes, etc. Probably that would have been enough to put me in clerical garb; it certainly landed me in theological seminary. But as to how I got the intellectual collar on backwards—that's a different story. That happened in seminary, not before."

"Oh, no!" Cavender broke in. "Am I to hear the fascinating story of how Theology 650 opened your eyes to—what's the Swedenborgian phrase—'heaven and its wonders and hell'? In a sense I suppose I asked for it. But please, don't get too emotional; I have a sympathetic ulcer."

"Relax, Ross," I answered. "It isn't going to be that kind of tale."

"I hope not. And spare the academic minutiae. My LL.B was no snap, you know. Even today the very thought of the supersedeas writ makes my blood run cold."

"It's odd that you should speak of blood running cold," I said. "That definitely ties in with a certain event in my seminary experience—an event I was about to describe

to you. As a result of it, I became—how shall I put it?—theologically inclined. And maybe without it I would never have finished seminary or been ordained. Shall I go on?"

"Sure, sure. As I said, I asked for it. I'll try not to derail your train of thought again."

The fire was burning brightly; the few people who had been in the room when we entered were now gone. The cocktail hour had passed, and the winter evening was already settling down around us. With the realization that I could have told the story only to a skeptic such as Cavender—since his ridicule was predictable—I began.

* * *

Theological seminary is an unpleasant period for many who go through it. I think this was doubly so for me. There was the usual feeling of intellectual descent, for, say what you will about a secular university, heat is seldom substituted for light there. But over and above that, I felt definite alienation from the whole program. What did all this doctrine and Biblical study have to do with life, and with changing society? In college I had been what C. S. Lewis somewhere calls a "Christianity-and" man — "Christianity-and-pacifism," "Christianity - and - vegetarianism," etc. I wanted to set the world rightside up. Marx turned Hegel's dialectic on its head; I wanted to put corrupt America—or some segment of it—on its feet again. But what good was abstract doctrine? "Justification by grace through faith": I thought it was utterly impractical. "The resurrection": absurd and irrelevant. "The new birth": revolting. "Angelology and demonology": medieval and essentially immoral. It was my middle year in seminary, and I had just about decided to quit the whole business. For the previous week I had been reading and comparing catalogues of schools of social work. No pie-in-the-sky idealism there!

Then I received my preaching assignment to St. Paul's church on

the Old Drummer's road.

Perhaps I had better explain the expression "preaching assignment." (At this point Cavender mumbled that he didn't care much one way or the other—but if it would make me happy . . .) At the small seminaries of our denomination, the students are expected to lead the services at nearby churches with vacant pulpits. The theory is that the student can't do excessive harm to the congregation, and the congregational experience may conceivably do the student some good psychologically. Moreover, at least in my seminary situation, the experience definitely did the congregations and the students good financially, since, on the one hand, the pulpits could be filled at fees so ridiculously low that an ordained man would not even consider them sufficient for carfare, and, on the other, the students were generally so broke that any remuneration was viewed as manna from heaven.

Since I was unquestionably in the latter category (this being, I felt, my only genuine common ground with the other students), I leaped at the chance to take the assignment.

I should mention that our seminary was in one of the older rural sections of the Midwest. Little towns connected by irrationally laid-out roads dotted the whole area in a radius of three hundred miles around the seminary. A file of old church bulletins and maps drawn by previous student pastors was the best way of keeping track of the numerous churches which begged for aid—in the most heart-rending terms—from time to time.

After the assignment came from elderly Dean Rylsford ("bless his heart," I thought, "the seminary would disintegrate without him"), I consulted the file. I went through it three times, looking under "P" for "Paul's," "S" for "Saint," and finally—cursing (but just "damn," for this isn't really "taking the name of the Lord thy God in vain")—under "I" for "Indiana." Nothing. Then I took all the files out of the battered desk drawer, and found,

crumpled at the back, an old map telling how to get to St. Paul's. The paper was badly yellowed, and the writing was almost illegible. The map had apparently been held too near a fire on some occasion, for it was plainly scorched. But it gave me the directions I needed, and that was all I cared.

Sunday morning, I arose early—but no earlier than absolutely necessary. When faced with a preaching assignment, my regular procedure was to determine the exact distance to the church, divide it by forty miles an hour (the average speed my car could travel without the motor dropping out), and one-half hour for service preliminaries at the church, and then get up not a minute before the required time. Since St. Paul's appeared from the map to be one hundred and twenty miles away, and the service was scheduled for ten-thirty, I left the seminary at seven.

It was a stormy February day—the first Sunday in Lent, to be exact. Wisps of snow were in the air, and the wind was strong. Fortunately the roads were clear: I would make good time.

The first lap of the journey was along highway 37, a well-paved east-west road crossing the state. I was to go eighty miles due west before turning off onto a county road. I felt relieved that the first part of the trip was to be so unproblematical. I would have an opportunity to run through my sermon again. The speedometer registered exactly forty.

My sermon was on the Gospel lesson for the day, and, if I did say so myself, it was one of my better homiletic creations. A year ago, when I first delivered it on a similar preaching assignment, it had gone over very well. I still remembered the wife of a member of the church council saying at the door after the service: "You have a great future ahead of you, young man." Perhaps she was right, but I was no longer sure that it lay in the ordained ministry. Thank goodness this was a Sunday when I could

give one of my really satisfying sermons; I didn't think I could have stomached again, for example, the naive, supernaturalistic message I had once prepared for the previous Sunday of the church year, when the Gospel lesson reads:

Then Jesus took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again.

I had certainly beat the drum for fulfilled prophecy and a historical resurrection in that sermon! How simpleminded can one be? And I had noticed that the comments at the church door afterwards were not at all as effusive as I would have liked. Some people even had tears in their eyes.

But this Sunday would be different. It is true that on the surface the Gospel lesson seemed typically theological and miraculously-oriented. But it just needed the kind of modern interpretation my sermon provided. You of course remember that Gospel lesson for the first Sunday in Lent. ("Naturally," Cavender said with a sly smile, "but you might refresh my memory on the details.")

The lesson is the familiar temptation-in-the-wilderness passage, beginning: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." Old devil presents three temptations: make stones into bread to satisfy hunger, do a miracle to show personal power, and worship evil in order to obtain all the kingdoms of the world. Naturally Jesus refuses. Sounds a bit histrionic and overdone as it stands, eh? That's what I thought, and in my sermon I attempted to bring out the real essence of the passage.

First I pointed out that the modern mind has to give up the primitive idea of a personal evil being ("devil," "Satan," etc.). However, as a symbol the concept still has meaning, for it indicates how far short of evolutionary perfection we still are. (The previous year some of the congregation had appeared puzzled at the phrase "evolutionary perfection," but I determined to retain it, for it's a compliment to a congregation to speak over its head on occasion.) Then I dealt with the temptations themselves. What was the point of them all? Why, to show the evils of selfishness. If Jesus had made the stones into bread for others—if he had jumped off the pinnacle of the temple in an attempt to show others that society should learn to control the powers of nature—if he had gained the kingdoms of the world in order to create a model government and social milieu for the benefit of mankind—"then," I had thundered a year before, "then the situation would have been different, far different." This passage, I argued, should warn all of us against the dangers of self-centered lives, and we should follow Jesus, the ideal Master, in rejecting all temptation to do ourselves good when we should be doing good for others.

The sermon sounded even better to me as I reviewed it than it had a year before; and I particularly prided myself that I had exactly countered the advice of my drab homiletics professor: "to present Jesus always as Saviour, never merely as example." But further musing was now impossible, for I had reached the turnoff.

The map told me to go left, that is, south, on county route 6A, and continue on for twenty miles until I reached Sodom Junction. The road was not very well paved, and the wind was definitely increasing in velocity. It was already 9:30; apparently I had let the speed drop below forty miles an hour while I was going over the sermon. Now I had to concentrate entirely on the driving or I would be late. This thought made my stomach turn over,

for Dean Rylsford, though a mild man, had one phobia: students must not be late for assigned services. Of course, what difference did it make if I were going to leave seminary anyway? But, I reproached myself, even the philosopher Kant maintained such a regular schedule that the burghers of Königsberg could set their clocks by his walks to and from the university. I pressed harder on the accelerator.

At five minutes before ten I arrived at Sodom Junction—if such a collection of ramshackled old stores and deteriorating houses could be dignified by a name. Why it was called a junction I could not imagine, for there were no train tracks that I could see. But the "Sodom" was certainly appropriate, I said to myself—if one thought of the Biblical Sodom after, and not before, the fire descended from heaven (or rather—I rationally corrected myself—natural volcanic eruption engulfed it).

I was now to turn right on the dirt road which crossed 6A. This was called the Old Drummer's road, according to the map, and St. Paul's church was on a cutoff some twenty miles beyond Sodom Junction. I tried to see a road sign or directional indicator for confirmation, but there was neither. Since it was Sunday morning, the stores were all closed; and even the houses showed no sign of life. "Probably damned superstitious Catholics," I thought, "up for 6 A.M. mass and now back in bed." However, there could be little real doubt about the route, for only one east-west road crossed 6A at the town. I wheeled the car to the right and started off again. Ten o'clock—just a half-hour to go. By my original schedule I should have arrived at the church by now.

I gunned the motor, and in spite of the wretched driving conditions—snow was coming down steadily and the wind was blowing it directly at the windshield—I managed to maintain an insane speed of fifty-five. Fifteen minutes went by. I was becoming more and more nervous.

The road began to twist and turn.

The landscape (as much as I could see of it) became heavily wooded, but had a burned-over appearance.

At 10:25, to my great relief, I saw the church, just off the road to my left.

It was a profoundly depressing sight—more depressing, if possible, than Sodom Junction. The building was short and squat, and though built in a cruciform pattern, the transepts were far longer than the nave. Obviously the builders had had only a rough idea of proper ecclesiastical symbolism. The exterior was of brick, and was blackened from age or perhaps from a fire which had given the woods their burned appearance, but which had been stopped just before it reached the church.

There was no parking area, and no other cars were visible. I pulled over to the left side of the narrow road, switched off the motor, yanked the emergency brake on, and leaped out of the car.

As I did so the wooden double doors of the church opened (they were a sickly yellow-orange color—perhaps they had originally been an off-shade of red), and a man of about seventy appeared. He moved stiffly and slowly down the steps and came toward me. His bent frame reminded me of a large bug, but that, I said to myself, was hardly the gracious thought a seminarian should have toward one of God's old soldiers.

"You must be our young man from N—— Seminary," he wheezed. "You had us a bit worried, though we seldom start the services right on time. My name is Oldstone—Enoch Oldstone—and I am president of the council. Do come in out of the damp."

I followed him into the church while exchanging the usual pleasantries. The interior was one of the strangest I had ever encountered—and I had seen many examples of midwestern churchmanship.

The strangeness did not come from any bizarre substitutions for the usual appointments, such as in one little Ohio congregation where I had

been appalled to find colored Christmas tree lights used on the altar throughout the year. Rather, one received the impression in St. Paul's that everything was almost correct, but not quite. For one thing, in line with the squat exterior of the building, the horizontal dimension seemed to predominate over the vertical: the pulpit was too low; the altar was too low; the candles on it were too short. And the cross—the altar cross—could its horizontal axis possibly be longer than the vertical? Clearly it was a Greek cross and not a Latin one; there was nothing wrong with that, needless to say, but the vertical axis did look shorter. Perhaps it was an illusion due to the bad lighting, I told myself. The stained glass windows were competently done, but in much too sombre shades. Almost Calvinistic in their severity, I thought. And the scenes! What odd choice had dictated them? Oh, they were Biblical all right, but they depicted such Old Testament episodes as Saul consulting the witch of Endor, and Elisha's bears eating the insolent children; and such New Testament events as Ananias and Sapphira being struck dead, and Simon Magus attempting to buy the Holy Spirit. My eyes travelled to the congregation itself, if it could be called such. There were not more than twenty-five people present in all, though the church could have held ten times that number. They were not seated together, but (I thought with relief) at least they sat near the chancel. Then I saw the reason: an old woodburning stove not far from the pulpit. And yet, it was certainly warm enough in here without sitting that close to the stove . . .

I suddenly realized that Enoch Oldstone had asked me a question. Flustered, I had to have it repeated.

"Would you like to have me go over the peculiarities of our service with you, young man?" he queried in a rasping voice.

"I don't think that will be necessary, thank you," I replied. "I

have done a great deal of supply preaching in recent years." (The plural "years" was a bit of an exaggeration, but I liked to set nervous congregational members at ease.) "You might, however, mention any radical differences between your service and the Common Service."

"Well," he began with a hoarse chuckle which I did not entirely like, "we have made a few alterations—but what congregation hasn't, I always say. Every congregation has its favorite portions of the service, and traditions do grow up. Doesn't the Confession put it well when it says, 'It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies everywhere be the same'?"

I nodded painfully, wondering what was coming next. I had never been especially good at introducing liturgical innovations without prior practice.

Apparently sensing my dismay, Oldstone said, "My boy, why not just let me take the opening liturgy? I serve as lay reader here regularly, and"—he gave me an odd look out of the corner of his eye—"we don't get young men of your potential very often. We want to make you feel at home, yes, right at home." (Why did he stress that? I asked myself.) "You just give the sermon. It is on the Gospel lesson, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"Wonderful!" He clasped his thin hands together. "A glorious passage! It's our favorite here at St. Paul's, or as we familiarly call our old church, St. 'Pollyon's. The ending seems a bit inconclusive, but"—he added hastily—"we shouldn't question things deeper than ourselves. As the Good Book says, 'His ways are deeper than our ways.'"

I was sure that the verse read "higher" rather than "deeper," but there was no point in being pedantic. I accepted the offer with great relief.

By then an old lady had begun to play the prelude on the pedal organ. A deep depression was settling over me as we walked slowly up the aisle

and took our seats. I was so overwhelmed, either from the exhaustion of driving or from the excessive heat in the chancel, that I fancied the prelude to consist of selections from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. "What absurdity," I thought. "I must get a hold on myself before the sermon."

Oldstone carried the liturgy along very effectively, I had to admit. But he mumbled to such an extent that I found it difficult to catch the words. At a few points he seemed to become positively elated, as for example in the Introit and the Gradual when the Psalm reads, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." The Gloria Patri and the Gloria in Excelsis did not, as far as I could determine, come into the service at all, but this was probably one of the local variations Oldstone had referred to previously. The Creed plainly had been reworked, and the phrase "principalities and powers" was inserted at several places. But my mind was badly muddled. I could not be certain what was said. The heat was becoming insufferable.

Finally the time for the sermon arrived. I rose and went to the pulpit. Oldstone jumped up ahead of me and removed a worn volume from it to make room for my notes. Did I read the title right as "*Malleus maleficarum*"?

I looked out at the twenty-five or so men and women in front of me. Their eyes, I realized with suppressed horror, were glowing like so many red coals in the dim light of the church. Some seemed to be licking their lips, as if in anticipation. "For the meat of the Word," I fervently hoped.

I began. My exordium dealing with the primitive foolishness of literal belief in the devil did not seem to go over very well. Some of the congregation were frowning and others were picking at their hymnals in an irritating fashion.

Then I discussed the temptations as such. The congregation clearly appreciated this much more than the preceding. As I argued that Jesus should have made the stones into

bread for others, they smiled—or perhaps "grinned" would better describe it. When I noted parenthetically that Jesus, even as the Ideal Man, could hardly have thwarted the laws of gravitation, they began to show real interest. When I came to the possibility of man's gaining the kingdoms of the world for purposes of social reform, they were positively ecstatic. And they didn't seem to have a bit of trouble with "evolutionary perfection."

This positive reaction should have pleased me, I suppose, but, frankly, the effect was just the opposite. As their eyes grew brighter, and as they licked their lips more obviously, I felt the heat rise until I didn't think I could bear it. And—was it possible?—the congregation seemed, if anything to draw closer to the fire, and bundle themselves up to a greater extent in their heavy coats and scarves. In contrast, I found myself trembling with sweat and fear.

Finally something within me snapped. Instead of using the peroration in my notes, I began to preach *ex tempore* on Jesus as Lord and God—being tempted by the devil to renounce His saving purpose for the human race—but conquering the evil one with those magnificent words, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

As I sat down, the congregation showed definite signs of irritation. Their eyes no longer glowed very brightly, and some faces looked ashen. No one was licking his lips. The temperature had dropped appreciably.

Oldstone concluded the service—a bit summarily, I thought, but none too soon for me. At the door he told me that the congregation customarily remained in their pews for Sunday school, but that I needn't stay for that. He emphasized the "needn't." Then he said with an expression of sadness and disappointment: "You were doing wonderfully, my boy, until the last part of the sermon. You ought to change that

conclusion; the people didn't like it. I'm sure of that. Too theological for us simple folk. We thought that you'd be able to stay and be, er, a part of our eucharistic service later. From all we heard, you would have fitted beautifully into our little congregation—perhaps on a permanent basis. We haven't had a pastor in many years . . ." He looked wistfully at the communion table, and his pale tongue passed quickly over his thin lips. "But I don't think you're quite ready, my boy. Go back to seminary for a while longer. And THEN COME BACK TO US HERE AT ST. 'POLLYON'S."

These last words were said with almost hypnotic force. I shuddered, but did not reply. He turned and proceeded, bug-like, down the nave. I fled to my car and drove like sixty back to Sodom Junction—to route 6A—to highway 37—to the seminary. That day I became a theologian.

* * *

"And that's it?" said Cavender with a look combining amazement with authentic concern.

"That's it," I replied. "Except for a little historical background I acquired the following week at the seminary. No one else seemed to know of a St. Paul's church in that locality, so I checked a few old histories of the synod. There had

been a church all right, but all the histories agreed that it had burned down in a lightning storm in 1867. One writer said that in the synod at the time some suggested maliciously that the fire had been deserved—that the congregation had been cheating on its benevolence budget for years, and that strange goings-on had been reported there from time to time, especially on All Saints' Eve.

"Oh, yes, and one other thing," I added. "When the Dean heard that I had come back from St. Paul's—or St. Apollyon's as they called it—he said to me: 'Glad to see you, young man. I prayed for you much this weekend. It's been some time since one of the men has been called to supply at St. Paul's. I presume that you will want the advanced seminar in dogmatics next year?' 'Praise God,' I answered, 'that is just what I want.'"

"You expect me to roar at the whole thing, don't you?" Cavender asked. "Well, you get a surprise. Sure, I'm a skeptic, but not a fool. That 'more things in heaven and earth' bit is quite sensible. And wasn't it your Luther who said that the devil is God's devil?"

"Quite right, Cavender. And that fits very nicely with the Gospel lesson for that first Sunday in Lent: 'Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.'"

AN EPISODE OF PREP SCHOOL HISTORY

By Peter Cannon

When you have been at school with fifty other boys your own age for three or four years, you naturally develop a sense of family, though you may feel fonder of some members of that family than others. Thus the news of the death of a class-mate, even of a loner like Walter Prescott, comes as a harder shock than anticipated. Everyone in our class, thanks to college deferments, missed Vietnam, and we didn't suffer our first loss until nearly twenty years after graduation. For all the predictably morbid and melancholy reminiscing among those of us who got in touch in the aftermath, few had any real information, as no one had seen or spoken to Prescott in more than a decade. Only Bemberg had anything new to share, and even that was a story which Prescott had confided to him years ago concerning his brief stint as a teacher at a rival boarding school. While this dubious story sheds no light on the mystery of Prescott's premature death, Bemberg believes that in ways we couldn't begin to guess at it has some bearing on the matter.

In accepting the position of teacher of English at Aquidneck Academy, Walter Prescott also agreed to be in charge of a special collection of books bequeathed by Aquidneck's most distinguished alumnus and chief benefactor, the late Charles Brinley Walling. During the interview with the headmaster, when Dr. Hoyt had asked if he had any "curatorial" experience, Prescott had replied uneasily that he had once audited a graduate course on rare manuscript and book preservation that at the time had aroused his antiquarian instincts. To his relief Dr. Hoyt had simply nodded approvingly and moved on to discuss the idea of his helping to coach middler tennis in the spring. Awkward and of slender build, Prescott

had little to offer the Aquidneck athletic program. Happily, however, a good many varsity types already belonged to the faculty, and the authorities did hire him, in the apparent confidence that he possessed other talents—intellectual prowess, the right background and education—likely to bring credit upon both himself and the school.

That September, as first the new then the old boys arrived on campus, Prescott settled into the bachelor apartment attached to Red Dorm on the third floor of "Old School." From his cramped living-room study under the eaves he had a view across a quadrangle to Aquidneck's magnificent Gothic chapel, whose four-spired tower, rising to a height of almost two hundred feet, dominated the neo-Georgian school buildings below and stood as a beacon for the entire county. Charles Brinley Walling, he recalled Dr. Hoyt telling him, had donated the funds for its construction soon after returning from the Great War: a monumental token of his affection for the school where, just a few years earlier, he had served as Senior Prefect and won numerous prizes as its top scholar-athlete. Up until the day of his death he had remained Aquidneck Academy's most devoted supporter. The previous fall, as stipulated in his will, the body of this beneficent man had been laid to rest in the chapel crypt, in a ceremony attended not only by every important member of the school family but also by many of the most prominent religious and business leaders of the state.

Kept busy with faculty meetings and the preparation of the curricula for his third and fifth form classes, Prescott did not learn of his duties as overseer of the Walling library until the party to welcome new masters hosted by Dr. and Mrs. Hoyt in the spacious headmas-

ter's apartment on the second floor of Old School. There Bill Geiersbach, the English department chairman, drew him aside to give him the details.

"The books have been set up in the chapel tower room," Geiersbach informed him. "All you really have to do is make sure you lock up when you leave. We don't want boys sneaking in and stealing the more valuable volumes to pawn for copies of Playboy in half-town." Geiersbach chuckled. "You'll have the use of the tower room as your office, and you'll be responsible for supervising a study hall there three evenings a week. I realize that 'rabbit-hutch' you inhabit in Red Dorm is short of amenities, so I bet you'll want to do a lot of your own work amidst the comforts of what will be for all practical purposes your private library." While he declined to say so, Prescott found his living quarters considerably less appealing than the suite he had roomed in as a college freshman. After a pause they were joined by a nondescript woman in her thirties, whom Prescott recognized as the school librarian, Marjorie Pym.

"Ah, Marjorie," said Geiersbach, "I'd like you to meet your co-librarian, Walter Prescott. Dr. Hoyt tells me Walter's quite the old book expert. No doubt you can fill him in better than I can on just what's involved with the Walling collection." After exchanging greetings, Miss Pym launched into an explanation of how it was she had enough to do with the main library and could not assume responsibility for the Walling bequest as well, and what an imposition it had been on her to have to supervise its transfer and installation over the summer. When she ascertained that Prescott had yet to see the chapel tower room, indeed had only entered the chapel once for Sunday services, she proposed that the two of them go over for a tour that instant, while there was still some daylight. Ill at ease as a rule at large social gatherings, Prescott willingly agreed to this outspoken woman's

suggestion.

From Old School they walked across one of the diagonal paths in the quadrangle to the eastern or altar entrance to the chapel. Set in the stone arch above the doorway Prescott was startled to note three gargoyles—but gargoyles of a rather unconventional sort—a football player, a hockey player, and a baseball player. "Our sporting trinity," remarked Miss Pym. "If you look closely around the chapel you'll find other such whimsical mixes of the secular and the sacred."

A short passage brought them to the altar, draped with a simple cloth bearing the school seal, which they admired briefly before passing down the nave between the lines of high-backed pews. There was just enough sunlight left to illuminate the row of southern-facing stained-glass windows, which glowed in rich blues and reds. These depicted the usual saints, traditionally rendered, except for the last window. That one showed a smug-looking elderly man in vaguely Medieval dress, compactly built, with short-cropped hair and trim moustache, clutching a book under one arm and in the other a staff that resembled an oar. Prescott felt it had an almost irreverently modern air about it. In addition, the fellow appeared disconcertingly familiar. "The face was modeled quite closely on the Walling portrait in the Common Room," observed Miss Pym. "That window was put in ten years ago, not without, as you can imagine, some controversy."

At the rear of the chapel, by the main door, Miss Pym switched on the chandeliers, the better to point out the maze set in the marble floor of the narthex, though the pattern was obscured by rows of small wooden chairs. She showed Prescott the head of the maze in the northwest corner by the enclosed spiral staircase, which led up to the tower room. Before going up they descended the stairs to the crypt, to peek at the steel-barred door beyond which lay in blackness the tomb of Charles Brinley Walling. "The

crypt is very plain, a disappointment I should think even for the ghoulishly inclined," said Miss Pym. On their way back up they continued past ground level until they reached a landing, where a brighter light than that which lit the staircase revealed a heavy oak door, the entrance to the tower room. Miss Pym unlocked it, promising to get Prescott a duplicate key, then snapped on a switch inside.

Prescott was immediately struck by the homeliness of the high-ceilinged room, with a large mahogany desk at its center, a long table and chairs, antique lamps, threadbare Kilim rugs, and tall bookcases occupying all available wall space and interrupted at intervals by lancet windows and a sizeable wardrobe. Except for the wardrobe, which Miss Pym told him contained the costumes for the school's annual Christmas festival, the room was an almost exact reconstruction of Charles Brinley Walling's original study. Already a pleasingly damp, musty smell of old books pervaded the place. In surveying the contents of the bookshelves Prescott discovered that much of the collection consisted of early twentieth-century Modern Library and Everyman editions of the works of such classic seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors as Dryden, Marvell, Shadwell, Swift, Pope, Addison, Steele, Smollett, Fielding, Boswell, and Samuel Johnson. Only one bookcase, an old-fashioned one with glass doors, held volumes that appeared actually to date from that period or earlier. Many of these, judging from their titles, were in Latin and Greek.

"If you ask me," said Miss Pym, "I don't see that it does the academy any good to have these old books here. The more valuable ones anyway ought to be in a university library where they can be stored properly and be accessible to qualified scholars. They're wasted at a boys' school."

"Furthermore, if you want to know, the trustees including the headmaster had their doubts about accepting the collection in the

first place. As it turned out, however, they had little choice, although I understand the vote was close. In order to receive a generous gift of securities from the Walling estate the school had to accept the Walling library as well—one indissoluble package." Since, as Prescott had gathered, Aquidneck Academy possessed a small endowment compared to older, more established preparatory institutions, they could not afford to turn down such a bequest, however eccentric.

"Another thing too," continued Miss Pym. "Some of these books are scarcely for the eyes of teenage boys. For example . . . this item by 'Fra. Junius Eckhardt.'" From the middle drawer of the mahogany desk she withdrew a small key that she used to unlock the glass doors of the special bookcase. From it she removed a black folio volume that she opened upon the desktop. Entitled De Rerum Fabularum, Eckhardt's tome proved to be profusely illustrated with wood-cuts of naked bat-winged men, women with beaks and feathers, and other bizarre mythological creatures, often of a pronounced sadistic or erotic cast. Certainly, thought Prescott, this was stronger stuff than anything the boys were likely to find in Playboy in half-town.

As they left and locked the tower room, Miss Pym remarked that the spiral stairs continued on up for some distance until reaching a trap door (always locked) that led to the tower roof. Boys were known to venture into this upper region to sit and meditate or else to pursue less spiritual activities like smoking. Since the chapel tower room was to become his bailiwick, it was well that he be aware that the stairs were a potential hang-out for rule-breakers.

Over the next month Prescott found himself spending most weekday evenings in the tower room, at first supervising a few souls in a voluntary study hall, then, after the initial grading period, a larger company of boys whose course work had proven less than satisfactory.

On occasion, when he was off dorm duty, he remained in the room after the end of study hall at 9:20, to correct themes or, more often, to examine the old books that surrounded him. In particular, though he could not understand the Latin (he had never advanced beyond Caesar in school), he kept coming back to Fra Eckhardt's De Rerum Fabularum, which for a book printed in 1588 was in excellent condition, without stiffness or brittleness, as if it had been handled just often enough to keep it supple. One woodcut, plate XVII, disturbed him more than the rest. Not overtly lurid, it merely showed a robust man laughing in the face of a hooded skeleton brandishing a scythe.

Already pegged by his fellow faculty as a bookish type, Prescott reinforced this image as he spent more and more time in the tower room and came to regard the Walling library with a proprietorial air. Thus it was that he felt a sense of personal violation when he entered the tower room one Monday morning in November and realized that somebody had been there over the weekend: something was subtly amiss with the special glass bookcase, he surmised—the volumes not quite in their customary order. He regretted his casual practice of leaving the key in the unlocked front drawer of the mahogany desk, where anybody could easily find it. As he studied the arrangement of rare books more closely, he noticed some ashy matter on the rug in front of the bookcase. Putting his nose to the floor, he thought he detected the scent of tobacco or possibly even marijuana. He was unsure. Since Dr. Hoyt, Miss Pym, and the maintenance people (or "wombats" as they were popularly known) also had keys to the room, it was entirely possible that one of them had come in over the weekend. If not the headmaster or the librarian, then one of the wombats might have been responsible for the cigarette ashes on the rug. When he later asked Dr. Hoyt whether he had brought any weekend visitors around to view the Walling collection, the

headmaster said no. "Boys with stolen keys into mischief is my guess," he commented with a sorry shake of his head. "Keep a sharp eye out in case they try it again."

About two weeks later Prescott chanced to look out his window toward the chapel as he was getting ready for bed. It was a clear night, the moon nearly full, and he was certain that he detected a faint light in the lancet windows of the tower room. Mindful of the headmaster's warning, he decided to investigate. Within a minute he had left Old School, crossed the quadrangle, and entered the chapel.

Wanting to surprise the intruder, he did not turn on the lights, but made his way from memory across the narthex and up the spiral stairs. On the landing he could see a sliver of light underneath the oaken door, as if from the single desk lamp. Quietly he tried the knob, but found that it was locked from the inside. As he inserted his own key he could not help making a clicking sound, but in another second he was starting to ease open the heavy door. Then it abruptly stopped, as if he had hit up not only against some solid, immovable object but also against the will of somebody determined at all cost to oppose his own. As he tried to budge the door, he called more than once for whoever was there to let him in or else suffer the consequences, but there was no reply—only silence, as if the lurker behind the door were holding his breath and patiently waiting for his next move.

Angry and alarmed, Prescott was saved from this impasse by the sudden sound of rapid footsteps—footsteps coming down the spiral stairs behind him. He turned his head in time to see two boys race past the landing. On instinct he took after them, releasing the door, which he heard close softly and deliberately at his back.

The fleeing boys succeeded in getting out of the chapel by the narthex door before he collared them in the quadrangle. Prescott recognized them as Guy Segerman and Jim

Soby, two of the biggest trouble-makers in the fourth form. Making no protests of innocence, they silently followed him to his quarters in Old School. They seemed to him to be somewhat shaken, fearful perhaps of the inevitable punishment—bounds, suspension, possibly even expulsion depending on the gravity of past offenses.

"Please, sir," said the groveling Soby as he handed over a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, "there was someone else who came up and was in the tower room. No, we didn't see him or anything. We thought it might be you, sir, at first, 'cause we could hear you—or him rather—unlocking the door. We were coming back down, then panicked, I guess, when we saw you trying to shove your way in, and now you've got us. I mean, sir, isn't it much worse to have a key to a place like the tower room than it is for us just to be caught smoking on the chapel stairs?"

Prescott in his mind had to agree, but he was too unnerved to go back and check if this other miscreant was still in the tower room. Most likely he had already escaped. Indeed, as he gazed out his window to the chapel tower he could see that the dim light he had noticed earlier was gone.

Reporting Segerman and Soby to their dorm master, Bill Geiersbach in neighboring Blue Dorm, occupied him for the next half-hour, and he did not investigate the tower room again until the following morning. The door was locked, but this time inside he was discomfited to find the glass bookcase open and the copy of *De Rerum Fabularum* resting on the desk. Not only that, a distinct trail of ashy matter ran in between the bookcase and the desk, and there were even fragments on the pages themselves, including plate XVII. Things had taken a very serious turn—he would have to talk to the headmaster.

When Dr. Hoyt announced at assembly that Soby and Segerman would have to perform twenty hours of work crew as punishment for smoking in

the chapel after hours, he also warned in general against unauthorized visiting of school buildings, especially at night, and made it clear that further offenses of the sort would be treated even more severely. While he did not mention the presence of a third party in the tower room at the time of the Soby-Segerman smoking incident, the rumor had spread throughout the school that some unknown person had managed to get in and then out right under Prescott's nose. This caused him to lose a certain amount of face, with both students and faculty. In his discussion with Dr. Hoyt about the situation, the headmaster hinted that as a new and inexperienced master he had perhaps not demonstrated the best presence of mind in the circumstances.

Prescott vowed to himself that he would be especially vigilant from then on, even if it meant spending every free waking hour in the tower room. There he almost obsessively perused the Eckhardt volume, as if he hoped to discover some clue to his troubles in its pages. Plate XVII he felt held the key to the mystery, and he at last resolved to ask Kevin Watt, the Latin teacher, to translate the passages connected with the illustration over the Christmas break. Another episode in the chapel tower room, however, intervened.

The annual Yule Festival, per custom, was celebrated the night before the start of the Christmas vacation. Events included a service of hymns and carols in the chapel, the pews festooned with boughs of holly and pine; a candlelit banquet in the dining hall, where recorder-playing "minstrels" strolled among the tables; the procession of the Yule Log and the Boar's Head; and finally—the climax before the great fireplace—the Mummer's Play, with boys taking the parts of the Turk, the Doctor, the Jester, the Knight, and the Dragon. To participate in the play was considered one of Aquidneck Academy's highest honors, and there was much competition to be among the select. Traditionally one

of the smaller boys played the Knight and one of the huskier sixth formers the Dragon. Bill Geiersbach, as the school dramatics advisor, supervised the whole production, which everyone felt came off splendidly. Young Dixon, in the role of the Knight, in particular acquitted himself well, subduing the Dragon with a series of energetic blows from his wooden sword. Since the costumes were stored in the wardrobe in the tower room, Prescott had an excuse to be on hand to watch the fun of final rehearsal and to see that the books were left alone.

As Prescott was preparing for bed around midnight, he glanced out of habit at the chapel tower and saw that the tower windows were aglow, as before. This time he took the precaution of calling upon Geiersbach and persuading him to accompany him to the tower room. Weary from directing much of the evening's earlier festivities, Geiersbach rather grudgingly and groggily went along. The two set off for the chapel in their slippers and robes, and were careful to make no noise as they crossed the narthex in the dark and ascended the spiral stairs. Prescott quickly applied and turned the key to the tower room door, which was locked as he suspected it would be. Bursting in, they caught a fellow with his back to them in front of the wardrobe, attired in the Knight's costume, in the act of adjusting the papier-mache helmet on his head. Evidently startled by their entrance, this figure leaped lithely into the wardrobe and shut the double doors.

"Is that you, Dixon?" cried Geiersbach as he dashed up to the wardrobe. "See here, my boy, the festival's over and you have to get up early to go home." There was no response. Then, in a less jovial tone: "Come on out of there right now—or do I have to drag you out?" Geiersbach seized the doors of the wardrobe.

What happened next happened very quickly. The erstwhile Knight popped out, his face hidden by the visor of his helmet, and delivered Geiersbach

a smart blow to the head with the flat of his wooden sword, toppling him over. Prescott lunged, but like a running back eluding a somewhat inept tackler the costumed character dodged past Prescott and down the stairs. Unconcerned with the state of his prone department head for the moment, Prescott ran after the intruder. He had been through a similar scene before and was not about to let his quarry get away again. Switching on the stair lights as he passed the landing, he was too far behind to catch sight of him, though he could hear his tread on the stone steps. This time, however, the miscreant did not rush out across the chapel floor but instead continued downward—toward the crypt. Prescott was certain he had the little bugger now. He slowed down to a more moderate, dignified pace. Near the bottom he passed a discarded wooden sword and papier-mache helmet. When he reached the crypt he was just in time to see the steel bars of the door swing closed and through them peer a mocking, flaking face as dry and as dusty and as dead as the old books in the tower room above them.

Dr. Hoyt refused Prescott's outrageous request to have the tomb of Charles Brinley Walling opened. It was bad enough his barging in at such a late hour, mumbling wildly about something unnatural to do with the chapel tower room and somebody named Eckhardt. Yes, the headmaster could believe that he and Geiersbach had seen an unknown boy dressed in the Knight's costume in the tower room, and yes this same boy had then dropped the wooden sword and papier-mache helmet in the vicinity of the crypt—and yes, as Dr. Hoyt understood it, once more the culprit had slipped away without being caught. All this was only too plausible. But when Prescott claimed that he had seen the walking corpse of Aquidneck Academy's great benefactor lock the steel door of the crypt, clamber into his tomb, and slide the heavy stone slab back into place, what could one think? Dr. Hoyt sug-

(continued on page 33)

THE THING FROM THE SEA

By Frederick Cowles

It is said that the average criminal often finds a queer fascination about the scene of his crime, and is bound to return to it at some time in his life. Not that Sidney Bailey, managing director of Bailey's Multiple Stores, could be called a criminal. It is quite true that he would have liked to have killed Winnie, and also true that swifter action might have saved her from death. But he was not a criminal.

At the age of twenty-three Sidney Bailey, an unknown impecunious salesman, had married the wealthy Miss Dell, sole owner of the Dell Universal Store. The unbeautiful business woman, past the first flush of youth, had recognized Bailey's keen commercial instincts, and the marriage had been little more than a business partnership.

The Dell Universal Store became the Bailey Universal Store, and soon, backed by Winnie's money and Sidney's brains, had branches in almost every town in the provinces. But the woman was still at the helm—she was Bailey. She kept the reins in her own hands, and the husband was little more than a highly paid manager. How he hated it. He even wished that she would die so that he, and he alone, could be Bailey's.

She was a jealous woman, and kept an eye on her husband all the time. Often he would have liked to have gone abroad for his holidays, but she always insisted on the same place year after year—a dismal bungalow on the mud flats of the north-eastern corner of the Isle of Sheppey.

The fifth year of their married life was a stormy one. Sidney wanted to open a branch at Liverpool, but his wife would not hear of it. Quarrels were of almost daily occurrence, and they were hardly on speaking terms when the time for the annual holiday came round. On the island things went from bad to

worse, and Sidney found himself wondering how he could get rid of this incubus.

Then, in a little secondhand shop in Sheerness, he purchased an old book on magic and witchcraft, and read, half hopefully and half doubtfully, of methods employed in past ages for willing people to die.

That night he walked alone along the cliffs towards Minster, and all the time he willed, with all the power of which he was capable, that Winnie should die.

Next morning they were out swimming together. Suddenly she was caught in a current, and whirled away screaming for help. It flashed through his mind that his half-hearted attempts at witchcraft were working. Surely there was something devilish about it? He was a powerful swimmer and there was still time to save her. Then he thought of himself as the sole owner of Bailey's, and went on thinking until it was too late to do anything for his wife. The current had carried her out to sea. He caught a glimpse of her head bobbing up and down. Her bathing cap had fallen off, and her long hair was floating out behind. Suddenly he swam forward, but the current caught him and he had great difficulty in freeing himself.

Her body has never recovered from the water, and the coroner, in sympathizing with the mourning husband, highly commended him for his attempt at rescue.

That had been thirty years ago, and Sidney Bailey, stout and prosperous, chairman of his own company and of seven subsidiary companies also, had been foolish enough to return to Sheppey. The old bungalow had gone, but he secured lodgings in a comfortable little cottage, and wondered what on earth had induced him to revisit such a God-forsaken spot.

Out on the cliffs that night he

remembered how he had tried to weave a spell. Queer how it seemed to have worked! A bright moon was shining above Minster church. He would walk as far as the village and have a drink at the inn.

The return journey was tiring, and Sidney was painfully reminded of the fact that he was over fifty. It was an oppressively hot night, and he found himself longing for a swim in the cool sea. Well, why not? He was still a good swimmer, and it would freshen him up before going to bed.

Back in the cottage he donned his bathing costume and wrap, and then climbed down to the beach. He felt unreasonably annoyed to see that someone else was already enjoying a dip, but he consoled himself with the thought that there was enough sea for both of them.

It was very pleasant in the water. Sidney swam about for some time, and then he thought he would see what the other chap was doing. The moon was very bright and, by climbing on to a breakwater, he could just make out a black head bobbing up and down in the distance. He might as well be friendly, and swim over to the stranger if only for the sake of company.

The distance was more than he had calculated and it took some time to get near the bobbing head. At last he saw it quite near at hand, and gave a hail. There was no answer. Must be a surly kind of chap, or else he was deaf! Sidney dived, and came up very close to the head. He shook the salt water from his eyes, and then he saw, within a few feet of him, a yellow, phosphorescent thing, with a mass of long, black hair. The flesh was eaten away from the face, tiny crabs crawled in the sockets of the eyes, and a hideous

sea-snail clung to the place where the mouth had been. But the hair was still recognizable, and he knew the ghastly thing to be the head of the woman who had been drowned thirty years ago.

With a gasp of horror he turned and made for the shore. But the thing was after him. He could hear the gentle swell it made as it passed through the water. Something was clinging to his fingers. Some weed, perhaps! He tried to shake it free. Then he saw that it was black: it was hair and he was dragging that horrible head. With a scream he tried to release his hand, but the hair was twisted too tightly round his fingers. He could feel something cold and clammy pressed to the back of his neck: he could smell a sickening odour of decay. Something tightened around his throat. He was choking. O God! he was choking.

Extract from the Leysdown Courier, August 27, 1934:

A shocking fatality occurred just off Shellness on Tuesday evening last. The body of Mr. Sidney Bailey, the well-known director of Bailey's Universal Stores, was discovered on the foreshore. Mr. Bailey, who was staying at a cottage in the vicinity, had evidently gone for a moonlight bathe, and may have been overcome by cramp. One queer feature of this sad case is that a mass of dark-brown seaweed was wound about the dead gentleman's neck, but, in the doctor's opinion, this had nothing to do with his death. By an unusual coincidence, Mr. Bailey's wife was drowned at this same spot thirty years ago to the very day.

A TALE OF A LONELY ISLAND

By Jason C. Eckhardt

The Casco Islands Historical House was a straight-backed three-story brick building on the highest point of Brackett Island. From its eight-paned windows one hundred and fifty years of inhabitants had watched the city of Portland grow across the water; once they'd seen it burn down. That was westward. To the east, north and south could be seen the broad, blue sprawl of Casco Bay and the sheer tree walls of the other islands. In summer, bright sail triangles floated by or crowded around the one, state-owned dock. In winter only the ferry came out, and that half as frequently as in summer. The island's other houses were all half a century younger than the Historical House, and looked up to it on its prominence as children to a story-teller.

But such niceties were lost on Mr. Milton Twitchell. He was an historian and his interest lay in documents, not in scenery. His path that morning had been a straight one: from Silver Street apartment to ferry terminal, from terminal to Brackett Island dock, from dock to Historical House, from front door to favorite table. He'd made the trip innumerable times in his long years of research, and whatever charm the accompanying views may have once held for him was long since faded by routine. This day in particular, bright and gusty as it often gets in October, Mr. Twitchell had hardly glanced up from his reading matter the whole way.

The object of this consuming interest was the history of a certain Colonial-era family, the Winfields. They had been five—father Abraham, mother Susan, sons Isaac and Thomas, and daughter Elizabeth—refugees from an intolerant England and later a scarcely less restrictive Massachusetts Bay Colony. The mother, in particular, interested Mr. Twitchell, for it appeared to have been

she who decided (or precipitated) the family's moves. Tall, cow-boned, plain-spoken and persistent, Susan (Digby) Winfield was reminiscent of other women whom the Salem authorities would see fit to hang under the guise of witchcraft. But Susan had been wise enough to leave Salem in 1641, long before the witchcraft madness began, and all accounts record that she and her family were welcomed by the independent souls of the northern wilderness. Oddly, the Winfields declined offers of land on the Neck (as Portland's peninsula was then known), settling instead on the same island that now boasted the Historical House. Abraham set up his fishing trade with the merchants on Richmond Island, down the coast. Susan and her three offspring tilled the land they'd cleared, churned the butter, set preserves and kept the house warm and righteous for father's return. It must have been lonely, and terribly hard during the Maine winters, but it was the life they chose. Carrington Tanner, a resident of the Neck, wrote to his son in 1660 that the Winfields were ". . . a good people, but solitary & not given to much intercourse with our community, tho' Winfield's Island (i.e., Brackett Island) was only a short distance away." In general, the townsfolk liked Abraham and respected Susan. There was no question that Mrs. Winfield ran house and island.

Be that as it may, none could blame Mr. Winfield for deferring to his strong-willed and practical wife. This arrangement, accepted by all, might have continued over the space of a natural lifetime, but for the hand of tragedy. On March 5, 1642, Susan Winfield sailed her husband's modest fishing boat to the landing on Falmouth Neck. To see this woman on shore at all, much less alone, was cause for interest in the small community, so Mr.

Twitchell had little difficulty finding corroborative accounts of what followed. Mrs. Winfield was terribly upset—another surprise from the granite-hard woman—and her plain dress was dotted with blood. Mr. Winfield's prize musket lay in the water sloshing in the bottom of the boat. As the men helped Susan from the boat, her hands shook, and her normally booming voice was drained of power as she began to speak. Indians had visited Winfield's Island, and their trade had not been friendly. A boat and several men armed with muskets were readied even before Susan revealed that she was the only Winfield left alive.

Once again, Carrington Tanner picked up the tale. He had been a young man then and was in the party that landed on that horribly silent island. The Winfields were indeed dead, very dead. As used as the Englishmen were becoming to Indian raids, they were stopped cold by what they found near the Winfields' home. Mr. Winfield lay face-down in the snow by the garden, several vicious-looking gashes in his back and a musket-ball in the brain. The sons, teenage Isaac and ten-year-old Thomas, had gone down fighting; the older boy's beheaded and mutilated form sprawled across his father's fowling piece, and his brother's nearly severed arm still held a club. Tanner would not dwell on little Elizabeth's fate. The reader was left with the pathetic image of a small bed soaked in blood. The little house itself was in shambles, and the party wondered how Mrs. Winfield had gotten out alive.

Then something was spotted near the shore, downhill from the eastern field: the bodies of two Indians. Their canoe was there too, pulled up on the smooth stones and lined with fish. Had this been it, then? Had the Winfields been massacred for a day's catch? The Winfield boy must have gotten off a lucky shot before he'd gone down, for one of the bodies bore a neat hole in its throat. The other's cause of death was less apparent until the white

men prodded the body and the head rolled into an impossible position. Poor Abraham must have gone at this attacker with his bare hands, snapping his neck in his rage and frustration. The investigation done, the Winfield family was set in the cellar of their house, the ground still being frozen. The Indians were put back into their canoe and set adrift, a toy for the cold Atlantic.

Back ashore, Susan had given as good an account as she was able. She had been in the dirt cellar when the Indians arrived. It had all happened so fast—two of her children were dead before she'd scrambled out of the earth, and she had listened in horror as her baby was slaughtered in her own home. Before the Indians had emerged from their work, Susan had run to her husband's side—he was badly wounded but just alive—and gotten his rifle from him. The first Indian to emerge received a musket ball to the throat (he was, then, the Indian found by the water), but there were still three others inside. Susan, practical even in the midst of the horror, knew she could do no more; and ran to the landing where her husband kept his boat. She looked back once, and saw the remaining murderers emerge cautiously from her house. One put the barrel of his musket to Abraham's head and pulled the trigger. Abraham's gun was useless, its one shot spent; but the fleeing Susan dared not part with it.

Grown men had cried upon hearing the tale, but the effect on Mr. Twitchell was rather less. He closed the manila envelope over the account's antique pages and rubbed his eyes. He knew the story already; the Englishmen formed a deputation which eventually found the murderers hiding by the banks of the Presumpscot River. The three, who never offered an explanation for their cold-bloodedness, were hanged from a tree located near the modern-day intersection of India and Congress Streets. The Aucocisco, the tribe to which the killers had belonged, were furious over what they saw as

the groundless murder of three of their number, until "persuaded by God's own Truth, which cannot be polluted nor made unclear," but possibly aided by superior firepower. Mr. Twitchell had read it and reread it in at least three different versions, and was resigned to reading it in three more versions, if necessary. On A Troubled Bay: Colonial Life On the Islands of Maine would be perfect; Milton Twitchell's first book would have no errors. But at the moment he wasn't certain that he hadn't made some.

He couldn't understand why the surviving Indians had left two of their dead and a boatload of fish on the island. The English had put it down to "Native barbarism and stupidity," but that was just blind prejudice. It would've been highly atypical—worse, it didn't make sense. Mr. Twitchell wondered if perhaps the Indians had been in a hurry to evade capture, knowing that Mrs. Winfield had gone for help; but he still couldn't believe that they would leave their dead. Had the other three Indians even been there? Had Mrs. Winfield lied about them, knowing that some Indians would hang, in revenge for her murdered family? That, too, was unlikely. It was unfortunate—and possibly tragic—that the accused had remained tight-lipped to the end of the rope. But if there was another side to the story, Mr. Twitchell was determined to ferret it out.

A glance at his watch showed that only half an hour remained before the closing time of five o'clock. Mr. Twitchell groaned and looked at the historical mess he'd assembled on the table. In the midst of it, still untouched, was the bundle donated by a Winfield relative only a week before. When the librarian, Miss Turner, came by again, he asked whether he might stay a while after closing.

"It's unusual," she said, and frowned at the books and papers in front of him, "but I suppose so." Then she looked at her watch: "Oh dear, I have to be in town in an hour and the ferry's at 5:10 . . .

Well, all right, Mr. Twitchell. We know you pretty well, I think." The two exchanged inexpert smiles. "Be sure to lock up when you leave," she said, and placed a small ring of keys on the table. "This is for the front door and that's for the alarm. I'll be here until five, if you have any other questions."

Mr. Twitchell looked around and realized that he'd been the only guest there for hours. Satisfied with his solitude, he pushed his glasses down from his forehead back to the bridge of his nose, and reopened the file.

He didn't notice Miss Turner leave, nor the fall of night. His usual supper-time came and went unheeded, too, and still the scholar bent his balding head over his papers. The pile of notes he'd started that morning had grown to rival that of the documents, a mound of papers at each hand. But for the whisper of his pen on paper and the turning of pages, the old house was still. Vagrant winds came to rattle the windows, but finding no entrance passed away. Through the glass, twilight's exquisite purple had deepened into a star-tipped black; Portland's many lights sent wiggling reflections of yellow and blue and white across the water towards the islands. In a pause of the wind, by some trick of atmospheric, the sound of City Hall's bell winged over the bay and into the pale-walled room. It chimed clearly, gently, eight times. Mr. Twitchell looked up and said, "Hm?" For a moment he thought a question had been put to him. Then he pulled back his sleeve and stared at the watch-face there. It didn't seem possible, but there it was: he'd been there almost twelve hours. The collection of notes seemed ridiculously small for such effort and he decided that it was the end of the day's work. He was only part-way through the new file, but it would be there tomorrow. Let the guilty rest another day. Besides, if the documents continued on in the same vein, he probably wouldn't find what he wanted anyway. Mr. Twitchell

produced a slim yellow piece of folded paper from his jacket pocket, unfolded it and ran his finger down the list of times on it. If he hurried he could make the 8:10 ferry back to the city. A little late for dinner, perhaps, but some place would be open. Then he turned the schedule over and saw the words SUMMER 1984 printed upon it.

"Oh, hell," he said. Not only was the schedule for the wrong season—it wasn't even for the current year. "That'll teach me not to clean out my pockets," he muttered as he buttoned up his jacket. He'd have to take his chances on there being a boat soon; and if not, there was an inn by the landing. As he pushed the papers into neater, different piles, he kept out one particular book and opened it to a place kept by a bookmark. On the page was a portrait of Mrs. Winfield, done thirty years after the tragedy on the island. As in life, her portrait was the only likeness of the family to survive. Mr. Twitchell looked deeply at the reproduction; at the time it was done, Susan Winfield had become Susan Welch, was the mother of four more children (plus stepmother to two), and hadn't left Falmouth Neck in all those thirty years. She never went back to the island, and when Asa Brackett resettled it in 1710, only a shallow depression in the dirt and some rotting boards were left of the Winfield homestead. Susan herself survived one more Indian attack. In 1678, when the local tribes rose up during King Philip's War and burned Falmouth to the ground, Susan, then close to seventy, defended her home with an iron bar. She "did the Heathens most serious hurt" before being dragged off to the boat for evacuation. In 1690 the French and Indians returned, and Susan Winfield's luck ran out. The French recorded that, like her young sons years before, she went down fighting. She, along with the rest of the dead, were left to rot in the sun.

She had been a singular woman, and Milton Twitchell found himself

acquiring some of the respect for her that her contemporaries had had. Having witnessed the murder of her family, she had picked up and gone on and rebuilt her life. Her bravery in the face of deprivations and the recurring nightmare of Indian raids was phenomenal. Mr. Twitchell could think of only one other Colonial-era woman of such strength; of modern women, none. He wouldn't quite admit it to himself, but the old bachelor was rather taken with his subject. She deserved, at the very least, a clarification of her story.

"You've kept me up late enough, madam," he said, and shut the book. He looked up from it and Susan Winfield looked back from the window. It gave him a shock, but it was only an afterimage on his eye. It was, anyway, until it raised a calloused hand and tapped the window. Mr. Twitchell took in a long, silent breath and held it. The woman's eyes pleaded with him but she remained silent. Mr. Twitchell had pushed his chair back against the wall and was trying to push it further. Just a coincidence, he thought, just some local woman wondering why the lights are still on. He let go of the chair, smiled weakly and held up his finger to indicate that the woman should wait. He shook his head as he strode to the door, thinking what a fool he must have looked. She did look like old Susan, though, right down to the stiff collar and grey bonnet. . . . Something was wrong with this picture, he realized, and stopped short of the door. Looking over, he saw that the woman had gone from the window. Am I just tired? Mr. Twitchell thought. He stood, irresolute, for a long moment, then went back to the table. He grabbed the keys Miss Turner had left, walked back to the broad, brown, paneled door and locked it. At any moment, he thought, she'll knock and ask to be let in—but she didn't. When nothing happened after two or three minutes, he shut off the lights and backed away from the door. A bit of light caught the edge of his eye and turning he saw that the woman was

back at the window. Now he knew something was wrong; for her face shone as distinctly in the dark as it had when the lights were on. Mr. Twitchell had long ago acknowledged that he wasn't a brave man; so rules of conduct didn't restrain him from finding the deepest, most secure closet in the house, and putting himself in it, before the woman at the window had a chance to repeat her tapping.

Even so, it was a very embarrassed man who opened the door to Judith Turner the following morning. Her expression was one of anger and shock, her mouth hanging open and her brown eyes wide. The tangle the wind had made of her long, gray hair added to an overall look of bewilderment.

"Mr. Twitchell," she said, after an interval to allow him to be completely humiliated, "what—what is going on here?"

Mr. Twitchell tried a laugh that came out dreadfully. "Oh, I'm truly very sorry about this, Miss Turner. I—I, uh, I fell asleep, it got so late . . ." All the excuses he'd cooked up in the long, black hours dissolved in the light. Miss Turner turned violently away.

"The door is ruined!" she exclaimed. "This is terrible! I can't believe—" Words failed her and she faced Mr. Twitchell again. "How did this happen, Mr. Twitchell? Do you know who would've done this? Did you see them?"

She was holding the door part-way open so that he could see the front of it. It looked as though someone had gone at it with an ax; long gashes crisscrossed it over most of its surface. The door was, luckily, thick; but even so two of the panels were split all the way through. The brass facing around the knob was torn entirely away and the white door frame bore several ugly cuts. Brick chips littered the threshold, fallen from white scars in the wall by the door. Mr. Twitchell was dumbfounded.

"I . . . honestly, I don't know." And he really didn't know, that is, how this had occurred without his

hearing it. He let this stand as his answer to Miss Turner's question, though, because he had his idea about who had done it. On this point he felt it better not to add insult to the librarian's injury.

After reshelving his materials and answering a few questions for the tired-looking island constable, Mr. Twitchell walked to the dock and waited there an hour until the next ferry arrived. There was no reading today; the image of the shattered door persistently crowded his mind. When the door faded, he imagined Susan Winfield, fighting off the Indians her whole life, then persecuted even past the grave. Why hadn't he let her in last night? Could he have let her in? Was the whole business as real as the gashes in the Historical House's door? All he could be fairly certain of was that the wrong Indians had been hanged and that Mrs. Winfield had let them be hanged. Mr. Twitchell saw a mad chase down the echoing corridors of centuries, and the vision chilled him.

It was several days later before he worked up enough courage to return to Brackett Island. He delayed it as long as he could, but the deadlines of the book and a nagging need to clear up the three century old questions sent him back. The day was iron-gray and rain-swept, and it made his spirits sag. Still, he kept to his resolve. He went early in order not to be caught on the island after dusk, but circumstance played against him. The Welch/Marsden File, the one just recently acquired, had been taken by another scholar before Mr. Twitchell had arrived, and he had to content himself with rechecking other chapters of his book. The morning ticked by on the polished mahogany clock on the mantle, and still the file was in use. Mr. Twitchell took a long lunch at the dusty restaurant by the landing, in order to give the other scholar time to finish; but in vain. It was two before Miss Turner, casting worried glances at Mr. Twitchell, came by to tell him that the file was available.

He found what he wanted—though not what he had expected—after another hour and a half of searching. It was a letter from a Constance Welch, Mrs. Winfield's stepdaughter, written to a friend in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. Dated December 17, 1669, it described how Constance had taken care of her stepmother during an illness, and how the older woman had sometimes raved when the fever set in. The substance of her ravings had frightened the young woman, but it set in place the last piece of Mr. Twitchell's puzzle. It fit with a terrible certainty. Milton Twitchell, dumbstruck again and (it must be admitted) a little heart-broken, couldn't deny the evidence. His heroine had turned harpy in the space of a page.

But Mr. Twitchell wasn't about to be defeated. After a minute's reflection, as quickly as love can become hate, he turned disappointment into victory. He recognized the value of his latest revelation and determined to exploit it. It wasn't a major change in history, it's true; but its appearance in his book would help establish him as an authority. The casual observer might think that there was also a little revenge behind Mr. Twitchell's decision—but that would surely be doing him a disservice.

As far as he knew he was the first to see the Constance Welch letter—but what of that other scholar, who had the file that morning? There was no way of knowing, short of asking him, which he dared not do without revealing his secret discovery. Well, he couldn't alter the past (too well he knew!) but he could control the present. No one else must see that letter. When he was confident that no one was watching, he slipped the brown parchment sheet into the middle of his own file folder.

He made himself work right up to five o'clock, closing time, before bringing the file up to Miss Turner's desk. That way she had time for only a cursory look at it before putting it on the to-be-filed cart. Mr. Twitchell wished her a smug and

empty "good-night," to which she responded with a nod and a wary look.

The ten-minute walk to the dock was miserable. Rain had set in and thickened the advance of twilight. Mr. Twitchell's right hand felt highly sensitive to the weight of the folder it held, and he kept looking behind him for pursuers in the gloom. It would be good to be off of the island, good to be back in his own rooms with a cup of tea. For the moment it was enough to arrive at the dock unmolested and to find the Abenaki nosing up to the dock, her motor gurgling and her lights mellow as darkness fell.

The ride home gave Mr. Twitchell some time to reflect. The rushing and researching was done for now; all that remained was a big, grim "Why?" He summoned up the image of Susan Winfield again, deeply set eyes and solid, sweeping jawbone—the great, stoic heroine of the Islands. What twists of reason she and her family had fled in Salem had been nothing compared to the gloom they had brought with them to Maine. The months of toil on a wretched scrap of land in a Godless country; a weak and unambitious husband and three sombre children to feed, day after night after day after night; swarms of insects in summer, and incredibly brutal cold in winter, the wind coming through gaps in the walls like long nails into the skin, . . . And over it all hung the Puritan God, like a giant in black, half as mad as Susan Winfield herself. It wasn't so hard to understand. Maybe it was simply a lack of comfort, an aching memory of how it once had been back in London. Mr. Twitchell felt badly for the Indians, too, who had probably just stopped by to trade stories, and instead had walked into the white man's Hell. The three on the mainland had done nothing, hadn't even been there, and were hanged merely out of convenience.

The throb of the Abenaki's engines and the rocking of the rough water eased Mr. Twitchell's thoughts along. Turning and looking out the windows to his back, he saw the yel-

low rectangles of windows on Brackett Island's dark hump. Through the windows to his right he spied a sail, dim and pale, rocking wildly over the Bay. It, too, was headed into Portland harbour through the cold drizzle, and the scholar wondered what brave soul would be on the water on such a night.

The rain made the sound of many fingers tapping, and the bricks in the sidewalk glistened by street light. Mr. Twitchell hurried up from the Casco Bay terminal to his apartment on Silver Street; unlocked the ground floor door, ran up three flights of stairs and let himself into his own apartment. As he shed his wet coat and hat, he noticed that the radiators were making a new sound that night—somewhere between a thump and a gasp. The book will bring me a place with quiet radiators, he thought, putting water on to boil. As he waited for it, he withdrew the Welch letter from his folder and studied it by the lamp in the living room. It wasn't as though he'd stolen it, really. As soon as his studies were done, he'd slip it back into its proper place, where it could be found to verify his results. (The noise from the radiators was really getting annoying; he must talk to the landlord the next day.)

He walked to his window and stared out over Portland's sharp roofs toward the rainy blackness of the Bay. He idly ran his finger down the grooves of mortar in the exposed bricks of the wall. The building dated from around 1870, made of bricks from a brickworks that once stood right in Portland. He laughed at his musings—he couldn't escape history! For all he knew, the crumbled bones of old Susan Winfield had been mixed in with the very clay that housed him. When he turned back towards the room, a pair of arms emerged from

the wall opposite him. He couldn't breathe or move—all thought stopped. The arms were strong and lean under the gray of the sleeves, and the calloused hands looked all too familiar. The nail of the right-hand thumb was blackened as from a blow. The arms faded into the bricks at the elbows, and when Mr. Twitchell looked up to the appropriate height, sure enough, there was a face. It was an odd thing, but pits and bumps that had always been in the masonry fit perfectly into those stern features. Behind his recognition of those features, Mr. Twitchell was vaguely aware that the noises he had attributed to the radiators were taking on disturbing forms. The eyes in the wall, that Mr. Twitchell once recalled as pleading, now demanded. The rough hands jerked suddenly towards him. He flinched back and involuntarily wheezed out a plea. The thumping now had a sickeningly liquescent quality to it, and the gasps had turned into screams in the distance. The hands stayed rigidly out, the eyes in the brick were tight-rimmed with fury, soft whistles preceded every thump/chop, louder and louder, and children screamed for their mother, to their mother. . . . Mr. Twitchell had stepped forward and dropped the letter into those merciless hands before he realized that he'd done so. The rawboned hands closed around the papers and withdrew into the wall. The awful face was gone, too, but a high scream continued to rise in the stuffy air. Mr. Twitchell let himself down to a crumpled position on the rug, and didn't get up until long after the screaming had spent itself, and the teapot that had caused it had melted through.

Milton Twitchell now lives in New York and does something that has nothing whatever to do with history.

FEAR

That clot of darkness on the stair—
Something is standing there.

It follows me with gem-green eyes,
Or are they fireflies?

All night my blazing fire I fed,
Chill with a nameless dread,

And though I heaped the fire with wood,
Unmoved, the shadow stood.

It breathes a dank, unearthly cold
And smells of graveyard mould.

When daylight shone against the wall
Still stood that shadow tall.

'Twas there last night and there today.
Would it would go away.

Would I had never dared to look
In great-grandfather's Book;

Would I had never spoke that spell
Whose words were writ in hell;

Would I had ever learned to pray!
God, make it go away . . .

--Lin Carter

M.R. JAMES AND THE LIMITATIONS OF THE GHOST STORY

By S. T. Joshi

M. R. James (1862-1936) is the subject of universal respect: Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and other fantasists have paid homage to him; modern critics like Julia Briggs, Jack Sullivan, and others have discussed his work almost reverently—and acutely; James has inspired a miniature school of disciples, among them A. N. L. Munby, E. G. Swain, and perhaps Russell Kirk. The Provost of Eton College, a recognized scholar on mediaeval manuscripts, was of such a genial temperament as to have inspired hallowed treatment in the accounts of such of his friends and associates as Stephen Gaselee and Shane Leslie. It seems difficult to say anything bad about James: he perfected the ghost story; his polished, understated, erudite style is as different as possible from either the perfumed prose-poetry of Dunsany or the dense texture of Machen or Lovecraft. Only James could successfully set a ghost story almost entirely in a library ("The Tractate Middoth"); only he would open a story with a stunning and flawless imitation of a late mediaeval Latin treatise, a 150-word passage in Latin followed by the narrator's tiredly casual remark, "I suppose I shall have to translate this" ("The Treasure of Abbot Thomas").¹ If I take a dimmer view of James' work than many of his devotees, it is because I am frustrated that James knowingly limited his talents to a very restricted field and was profoundly out of sympathy with related branches of the weird tale. Lovecraft could enjoy both James and Dunsany, although he realized that they were at "opposite pole[s] of genius"; for James, his contemporaries Machen, Blackwood, and Lovecraft (whom he may have read) all wrote in vain, while he pays only the

most frigid respect to Poe.

My first concern with James is to examine the nature of his "ghost." Curiously, it seems remarkably material, and there are actually relatively few tales where it retains the nebulousness of the traditional spectre. Many commentators have noted the hairiness of the James ghost; perhaps Lovecraft expressed it best when he said that "the average James ghost is lean, dwarfish, and hairy—a sluggish, hellish night-abomination midway betwixt beast and man—and usually touched before it is seen." This is true enough, and the prototype is the figure in "Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book":

At first you saw only a mass of coarse, matted black hair; presently it was seen that this covered a body of fearful thinness, almost a skeleton, but with the muscles standing out like wires. The hands were of a dusky pallor, covered, like the body, with long, coarse hairs, and hideously taloned. The eyes, touched in with a burning yellow, had intensely black pupils, and were fixed upon the throned King with a look of beast-like hate. Imagine one of the awful bird-catching spiders of South America translated into human form, and endowed with intelligence just less than human, and you will have some faint conception of the terror inspired by this appalling effigy. (11-12)

What such a ghost symbolizes for James—the scholar and academician—is the routing of intelligence. The Jamesian ghost embodies all those traits of primitive man that are most frightening to the civilized and rational: not merely ignorance, but aggressively violent

ignorance. The effect is achieved in remarkably subtle ways: hairiness is frequently used as a symbol for barbarity, but note the simple description of a figure "crawling on all fours" (43) in the peculiar mezzotint in "The Mezzotint";² or the dog-motif that crops up in "The Residence of Whitminster," "The Diary of Mr. Poynter," and "An Episode of Cathedral History." The dog, too, one supposes, is representative of primitive savagery.

The taint of primitivism affects even the human characters in the tale. Of the evil scholar in "Lost Hearts" it is said that he wished to re-enact "certain processes, which to us moderns have something of a barbaric complexion" (33); needless to say, the victims of the "processes" return to exact ghostly revenge. Analogously, the central character in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas" "screams like a beast" (176) when the monster embraces him in the well. The rational mind cannot endure contact with the supernatural, and itself descends to barbarism. There is, in fact, only a single story—"Casting the Runes"—where a character even attempts (here successfully) to counteract the effects of the supernatural agency; in all other instances the Jamesian figure is singularly passive and resigned.

The "eccentric composition" of some Jamesian ghosts is remarked on by Lovecraft; he in particular found effective the "face of crumpled linen" (148), italicized in pseudo-Lovecraftian fashion, in "'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad.'" I wonder, however, whether Lovecraft or others have perceived that this tale—or, rather, the ghost in the center of it—may actually be a parody of the old-time ghost story with its sheeted figure mistily floating down some centuried corridor. Here the figure materializes itself in a prosaic seaside inn where a professor is vacationing; but I think we are to regard the jarring juxtaposition of unconventional setting and pseudo-conventional ghost—here literally manifesting itself in a bedsheet—as a

bit of fun on James' part. This is by no means to deny the unquestioned power and, even, originality of the conception; for the ghost is of course not the bedsheet itself but some invisible monster who can only be seen when embodied behind some material substance like a bedsheet.

The loathsome creature in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas" is initially described as "some rounded light-coloured objects . . . which might be bags" (175)—a hideously colloquial description. But later the monster, more clearly seen, is said to be a "horrid, grotesque shape—perhaps more like a toad than anything else" (179). Similarly, in "The Haunted Dolls' House" we encounter "a frog—the size of a man" (484). I can trace no especial symbolism behind this amphibian motif, save in its repulsiveness. The "Abbot Thomas" ghost not merely appears, however, but "put its arms around my neck" (175—those charming italics again)—a grotesque parody of affection. It is a theme similar to that of Robert Hichens' famous story "How Love Came to Professor Guilden" (1900), where, I think, it is handled even better.

James reveals a virtual obsession with the mechanics of narrating the ghost story. In many of his tales the narrator or central figure (very often they are not the same) pieces together various documents and presents them in artfully edited form. This method serves several purposes: it first emphasizes the fundamental rationality of the character, as it does in Machen's "Novel of the Black Seal" and Lovecraft's "Call of Cthulhu," otherwise tales as profoundly different from James' as can be imagined; secondly, it distances the narrative, frequently by several stages. This idea of "distancing" was very important to James. In his introduction to Ghosts and Marvels he notes: "For the ghost story a slight haze of distance is desirable."³ Here he refers, of course, to chronological distance, and this accounts for another curious phenomenon in James: the setting of many of his stories in the eighteenth or

early nineteenth centuries. James' method appears to require a modern setting, since he remarks in an essay on the need for the "setting and personages [to be] those of the writer's own day."⁴ This statement appears to contradict the "haze of distance" idea, but only superficially: for a scholar like James, accustomed to dealing with the ancient and mediaeval world, the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries would have appeared—as they did to a similar antiquarian, Lovecraft—a "fairly recent yesterday."⁵ Hence "Two Doctors" is set in 1718; "The Residence at Whitminster" begins in 1730, then advances another century or so; "Lost Hearts" is set in 1811-12; "A School Story" is set around 1870.

There is, however, a problem with even this pseudo-remoteness. The specificity of dates used by James compels the reader to envision a precise historical period, and the sense of familiarity with the characters and settings is, if not destroyed, at least muted. James warns against this by saying: "It is almost inevitable that the reader of an antique story should fall into the position of the mere spectator."⁶ This certainly argues a very elastic conception of history—and, perhaps, more elastic a one than James could rightfully assume in his readers. He would have been better off, I think, being a little vaguer in the dating of events. In only one tale, the very late "Rats," does he skilfully solve the problem: "I cannot put a date to the story, but I was young when I heard it, and the teller was old" (610). In an entirely different way, "Martin's Close" is a *tour de force* in its attempt to reproduce the actual diction of a late seventeenth-century court case, presided over by (as we all know from Macaulay) the redoubtable Judge Jeffreys. This is merely an extension of a principle running through James' work: the inclusion of pseudo-documents in his tales. We have already noted the lengthy Latin passage that opens "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas," but

we can also marvel at the perfect replication of the platitudinous eighteenth-century obituary (reputedly from The Gentleman's Magazine) in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" or the paraphrasing of various eighteenth-century documents in what might be James' most powerful story, "The Ash-Tree."

This finally brings us back to the role of the narrator or central figure, who acts as "editor" of this documentary material. The degree to which the narrator wishes to dissociate himself from the actual events is frequently remarkable: in "Count Magnus" the narrator paraphrases the victim Wraxall's paraphrase of documents he has discovered. Perhaps the greatest indirection occurs in "A Warning to the Curious," where at one point we have the principal (unnamed) narrator paraphrasing the account of a subsidiary (unnamed) narrator who meets a traveller, Paxton, who has heard a curious legend from a rector—and the rector himself has heard this legend from the "old people" (567) of the community. This is certainly narrative "distance" with a vengeance! In fact, the principal narrator never returns after he has yielded to the subsidiary narrator; just as well, one supposes, as by the end we have forgotten about his existence.

James can carry this indirection too far. In "The Rose Garden" the tale is so obliquely told that it is difficult to ascertain what exactly happened; in "The Residence at Whitminster" the many layers of narration ill conceal the tale's pointlessness and prolixity. James' narrator can also be quite disingenuous: in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" he remarks at one point that "I digress to put in a document which, rightly or wrongly [my italics], I believe to have a bearing on the thread of the story" (282). This false ignorance fools no one.

James also has a peculiar inclination to obtrude himself in the narrative at odd moments. "Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book" begins with a third-person narration about the character Dennistoun, but all of a

sudden we encounter this passage: "Once," Dennistoun said to me, 'I could have sworn I heard a thin metallic voice laughing high up in the tower. . . .'" It is significant that this is the first intimation of the supernatural in the story, but the very abrupt "distancing" is clumsy. In "The Mezzotint" we have this strange interruption:

He lighted the candles, for it was now dark, made the tea, and supplied the friend with whom he had been playing golf (for I believe the authorities of the University I write of indulge in that pursuit by way of relaxation); . . . (40)

This will, no doubt, be cited by James' supporters as an example of his dry wit; dry it certainly is.

In later stories James is fond of placing the central narrative—or, at least, the portion of the narrative that definitely involves the supernatural—into the mouth of a half-educated person who tells the tale in a roundabout and colloquial fashion. Two goals are met by this method: narrative distance is achieved, and the corrupting influence of the ghostly phenomena on those closest to it is suggested. Even James, however, never—thankfully—carried this practice to the grotesque lengths that we find in the subnarrative of Zadok Allen in Lovecraft's "The Shadow over Innsmouth."

James frequently goes out of his way to avoid any suggestions of sensationalism as his climax approaches. The italics to which he succumbed in "'Oh, Whistle'" and "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas" are rare exceptions; in other stories the purported climax is handled with absolutely no fanfare. This is doubly peculiar in that James speaks of the need of a "nicely managed crescendo"⁷ at the end of a tale. To be quite honest, I find no such crescendoes in James; in fact, often the reverse is—quite consciously—the case. The "climax" of "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral," the death of Archdeacon Haynes, is con-

veyed by a euphemistic eighteenth-century obituary; similarly the death of Elred in "The Tractate Middoth." The curious result of this and other of James' elaborate self-conscious narrative methods is to draw attention away from the events and to focus it on the narrative itself. There may also be a partial contradiction of James' principles of ghost-story writing. In speaking (presumably with Algernon Blackwood in mind) derisively of the intrusion of "psychical" theory, James writes:

I feel that the technical terms of "occultism," if they are not very carefully handled, tend to put the mere ghost story . . . upon a quasi-scientific plane, and to call into play faculties quite other than the imaginative.⁸

While James does not indulge in occultism, this "quasi-scientific" atmosphere is exactly what we find in much of his work. I am not referring to all the pseudo-scholarship (imagined mediaeval texts, bogus footnotes, and the like) that abounds in his writing; rather, it is more like what Lovecraft experienced when reading some of H. G. Wells' stories: "I can't derive a really supernatural thrill from matter which keeps my mental wheels turning so briskly; and yet when I think of some of his things in retrospect, supplying my own filter of imaginative colour, I am reduced to doubt again."⁹ Analogously, in James the reader must frequently expend so much energy simply following the obliquely narrated plot that there is no room for the "imaginative" faculty to come into play. It is as if writing a ghost story has become an intellectual game for James.

James has profounder limitations than this, and the principal one is simply that all his tales resolve, morally, into a naive tit-for-tat vengeance motif. James is certainly right to emphasize the "malevolent or odious"¹⁰ nature of the ghost; but in almost every one of his sto-

ries the malevolence is directed at someone who has committed some obvious moral outrage. This is a limitation, evidently, of the traditional ghost story in general, and gives to James' tales a curious repetitiveness and one-dimensionality; it is simply not possible to ring many —nay, any—changes upon this one theme. In some stories, of course, we are faced with apparently hapless characters who are destroyed by what seems to be the random vindictiveness of the ghost; but what conclusion we are to draw from this is not clear. Jack Sullivan writes:

The characters are antiquaries, not merely because the past enralls them, but because the present is a near vacuum. They surround themselves with rarefied paraphernalia from the past—engravings, rare books, altars, tombs, coins, and even such things as dolls' houses and ancient whistles—seemingly because they cannot connect with anything in the present.¹¹

This sounds very pretty, but there is no textual evidence to support it. James' antiquarians are either professionals or amateurs who pursue the past merely because it is their job or because it amuses them; the metaphysical angst implied in what Sullivan calls the "'Waste Land' ambience" of the stories is just not there. Occasionally we have dim indications that these characters have brought doom upon themselves: there is, in "Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book," a hint of Dennistoun's irreligiousness when he scoffs at wearing a crucifix to protect himself ("Well, really, Dennistoun hadn't much use for these things" [13]); while, in "'Oh Whistle,'" Parkins' radical disbelief in ghosts itself amounts to a religious dogma:

"Well," Parkins said, "as you have mentioned the matter, I freely own that I do not like careless talk about what you call ghosts. A man in my position," he went on, raising his voice a little, "cannot, I find,

be too careful about appearing to sanction the current beliefs on such subjects. . . . I hold that any semblance, any appearance of concession to the view that such things might exist is equivalent to a renunciation of all that I hold most sacred." (123)

But these hints are vague and, in the end, harmlessly jocular.

The fact is that it is simply not possible, as it is with many other authors of weird fiction, to derive a general philosophy out of James' stories. They are simply stories; they never add up to a world-view. The tales are all technique; a coldly intellectual exercise in which James purposely avoids drawing broader implications. It is not even especially fruitful to trace themes through his work; for both the vengeance motif and the ghost-as-savage theme remain virtually unchanged throughout his corpus. The vengeance motif is, moreover, not merely monotonous but ultimately unconvincing: this moral accounting for supernatural phenomena will simply not work for modern readers. Some sort of pseudo-scientific approach must now be used—either the quasi-scientific method of Lovecraft or, indeed, the very occultist rationalizations so scorned by James in the work of Blackwood: whatever we may feel about occultism, supernatural phenomena "explained" by it at least become subsumed into a viable *Weltanschauung*.

It is also quite obvious that James' inspiration began to flag very early on. If we concede that the eight tales in *Ghost-Stories of an Antiquary* (1904) are nearly perfect examples of the form, we must also add that the rest of James' work does little but ring increasingly feeble changes upon those tales. James' first collection is all that anyone need read of his work. It is particularly unfortunate to see James spin such an incredibly tedious tale as "Mr. Humphreys and His Inheritance" (avowedly written to "fill up"¹² his sec-

ond volume); all the later tales are dogged by hints of this sort of prolixity.

As it is, perhaps James is rather more interesting as a critic and theorist of the form. We are now concerned with three documents: the preface to More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary (1911); the introduction to Ghosts and Marvels (1924); and the lengthy essay "Some Remarks on Ghost Stories" (1929). The first two are principally theoretical, and impeccable as far as they go; they prove that James had clear principles for ghost-story writing (Sullivan makes much too much of James' apparent coyness and indefiniteness in this regard) and that he followed them closely enough, with the exceptions noted above. The final essay is a fascinating history of the ghost story—fascinating precisely because it is so bizarre. Admittedly, James seems to be narrowly restricting himself to the avowed "ghost story," so that perhaps it is understandable that such figures as Machen or Dunsany have no place in James' account. But James' highly ambiguous stance toward Poe is of interest. The editor of Ghosts and Marvels had selected Poe's "Ligeia" for inclusion, and James was forced to comment upon it; his cautious remark, "Evidently in many people's judgements it ranks as a classic," scarcely conceals his distaste. "Some Remarks on Ghost Stories" is ambivalent, as he speaks of "some Americans" (i.e., the pulp writers) who fancy that they "tread . . . in the steps of Edgar Allan Poe and Ambrose Bierce (himself sometimes unpardonable)"; but the hint of disapproval is strong. What offended James so much? Clearly it was the concentration on what he felt was the merely physically gruesome, as can be inferred in his slap at Bierce and also in his comment on E. F. Benson: "He sins occasionally by stepping over the line of legitimate horridness." Certainly he has nothing good to say about the American pulp writers: "The[y] are merely nauseating, and it is very easy

to be nauseating."¹⁵ This is really an unprovoked attack, since the pulp writers never considered themselves "ghost-story writers" and should therefore not even have been mentioned in James' essay. I think James' squeamishness prevented him from appreciating the fact that there is a lot more to the work of Poe, Bierce, Machen, and Lovecraft than merely loathsome physical horror; James' idol LeFanu can be just as revolting, but evidently his indirection appealed to James.

I have not much enthusiasm for James—this much is obvious from my discussion. I sincerely believe he is much inferior to the other writers mentioned here, largely because his work is ultimately thin and insubstantial. James showed little development over his career; if anything, there is a decline in power and originality, and a corresponding preoccupation—bordering upon obsession—with technique. He is clearly the perfecter of one popular and representative form of the weird tale; but in his very perfection of that form he showed, I believe, its severe limitations in scope. I have nothing to say about his disciples; only Russell Kirk—if we are even to consider him a "disciple" of James—has escaped these limitations to write work that is vital and significant. The ghost story as such does not allow very much room for expansion or originality; when some writers attempt to do so, they either fail (James' followers) or, in succeeding, produce tales that can no longer be called ghost stories (Oliver Onions). It is quite possible that James came to realize this, and that this is the reason for the very peculiar, self-reflexive nature of his later work: with Ghost Stories of an Antiquary James already exhausted the form, and could do nothing but move his limited number of components into various permutations to create an illusory sense of newness. But it didn't work, and few of his readers—even his valiant supporters, if they would only admit it—were taken in.

NOTES

¹Collected Ghost Stories (New York: Longmans, Green; London: Edward Arnold, 1931), p. 151. All subsequent references to the tales in this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²The description is repeated in the late story "Wailing Wall" (638).

³"Introduction" to Ghosts and Marvels, ed. H. V. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. vi.

⁴"Some Remarks on Ghost Stories" (1929), in The Book of the Supernatural, ed. Peter Haining (London: W. Foulsham, 1979), p. 23.

⁵Letter to James F. Morton [c. 1937], Selected Letters V, eds. August Derleth and James Turner (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1976), p. 431.

⁶"Introduction" to Ghosts and Marvels, p. vii.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁸"Preface" to More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary (1911), p. v.

⁹Lovecraft to Vincent Starrett (6 Dec. 1927), Selected Letters II, eds. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1968), p. 210.

¹⁰"Preface" to More Ghost Stories, p. v.

¹¹Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from LeFanu to Blackwood (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978), p. 75. Illuminating as I

found Sullivan's treatment, I think he wildly overstates the case for James. His comparisons of James to Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and Waugh are so grotesquely inapposite that I can only assume his enthusiasm got the better of him.

¹²"Preface" to Collected Ghost Stories, p. ix.

¹³The Book of the Supernatural, pp. 26-27.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 27. It would be interesting to know if Lovecraft is covered by this judgment, since James is commenting on the Not at Night anthologies of the late twenties, in which Lovecraft was included.

AN EPISODE OF PREP SCHOOL HISTORY
(continued from page 16)

gested that it would be in the best interest of both the school and Prescott that he not return for the term starting in January. Prescott agreed. Too sensitive and unhealthily bookish, not a varsity man, thought the headmaster—he should have known that Prescott might prove unsuitable when he hired him. Nonetheless, Dr. Hoyt sensed that in some way those old books were at the root of the problem, and he made a note to raise the issue again at the next trustees meeting of how the academy might circumvent the terms of the Wailing will and have the collection removed elsewhere.

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